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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, NEA/PPD, NEA/P, IIP/G/NEA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KPAO SOCI MU

SUBJECT: OMAN ONLINE: LOW-SPEED INTERNET, UN SPEECH, AND CHARITY

BEGINS AWAY FROM HOME

¶1. Summary: The Omani Internet message boards "al-Sablah" and "al-Majarra" are the liveliest and most comprehensive Arabic-language fora for political and social discourse in the country, touching on issues and personalities rarely addressed in the conventional media. While not totally free, nor wholly reflective of Omani public opinion, these popular sites nevertheless offer a worthwhile window into the hot topics and unvarnished views of the day. This edition of Oman Online contains the following topics:

-- Deteriorating Internet Service
-- UN Speech
-- Charity Abroad

End summary.

Gripes About Omantel

¶2. The week began with al-Sablah participants complaining about poor Internet services and the high costs charged to subscribers. "We are obliged to pay for bad quality services -- and it is expensive." Many complained about Omantel's monopoly as the Sultanate's sole ISP, and compared the Internet service provided in Oman with Yemen and Egypt: "Although these countries are considered poor, they provide Internet services free of charge to their citizens," one member groused.

Speech at the UN

¶3. Minister of Culture and Heritage Sayyid Haitham Bin Tariq's speech at the UN attracted a lot of attention among al-Sabla members. Participants analyzed the speech in relation to internal affairs, generating 230 hits and 20 responses. One member stated, "When the speech talked about financing projects, programs, and strategies to reach desired developmental goals, it was merely a reflection of the deteriorating economic situation of the country. Also, it showed that the Sultanate is going to ask for more loans." Other participants believed "the speech answered international demands to participate in the rebuilding Iraq by implying that Oman is not going to contribute because of lack of security." Another mentioned, "the speech dealt only in generalities because the government's performance has been so poor."

Charity At Home

¶4. Forum members reported that well-known UAE businessman Juma'a Al-Majid has sponsored 1150 students from different countries, including Oman, to complete their undergraduate studies at Dubai College. This topic generated 3,035 hits and 37 responses. Many participants agreed that rich and wealthy people should seek to improve the quality of life of other citizens, noting that prominent Omani businessman Saud Bahwan is trying to do the same thing in Oman. "Let's not forget Saud Bahwan who is known as a man of generosity in this country for his good deeds." Others mentioned "He (Saud Bahwan) donated air conditioners to a lot of schools, free lunches for poor students, and money to charities." However, 30 per cent of participants believed "these people are multimillionaires who control huge assets and entire industries. They should be expected to contribute to the development of their societies."

BALTIMORE